

not in N.Y.

Mr. Albert H. Griffith
from
J. M. Dickinson
February 25th 1909

**RESPONSE OF J. M. DICKINSON AT THE DINNER GIVEN
BY THE INDUSTRIAL CLUB OF CHICAGO ON THE ONE
HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ABRA-
HAM LINCOLN, TO THE TOAST, "A VOICE FROM THE
SOUTH."**

What I say will carry no significance, if I voice merely my personal sentiments, though they accord entirely with the spirit that prompted this memorial, and pervades this assembly. But in what esteem the South holds the name and fame of Abraham Lincoln is of national interest. All present should with sincere solemnity unite in honoring him, who is and always will be regarded as one of the world's immortals, and there should be no note of discord in the grand diapason which swells up from a grateful people in this Centennial Celebration. I would have stayed away, if I could not heartily respond to the spirit of the occasion, and would not speak in the representative character implied by an introduction as a "Voice from the South," if I did not believe that what I will say is a true reflection of the feelings and judgment of those who have the best right to be regarded as sponsors for the South. I recall as vividly as if it were to-day, when, in 1860, a messenger, with passionate excitement, dashed up to our school in Mississippi, the state of Jefferson Davis, and proclaimed that Abraham Lincoln was elected. The Brides of Enderby did not ring out in more dismal tones, or carry a greater shock to the hearts of the people. We had passed through a political campaign unsurpassed in bitterness. The true Lincoln had not been fully

revealed, and had been transformed in the South, as the great protagonist of the South was transformed in the North, by the heat of the fiercest controversy that our country had ever experienced.

In the youthful imagination stirred to its highest pitch by the explosive sentiment of the times, without the corrective of mature judgment, Mr. Lincoln's name was invested with such terrors as the Chimaera inspired in the children of Lycia. A wave of emotions, feelings of indignation, commingled with a vague sense of impending evil swept over us. Our souls mirrored the spirit of the times and its environment. From that day to the surrender at Appomattox, we would not have regretted the death of Mr. Lincoln any more than did the people of the North the fall of Stonewall Jackson. The war was protracted. There was time for revision of impressions. Sorrow in Protean forms, that pervaded every household, and like the croaking raven, seemed as if it would never more depart, attuned their souls to an appreciation, that those in the high tide of happiness and prosperity can never fully have, of facts that revealed a gentle spirit and a heart that was womanly in its tenderness, and in its sympathies commensurate with human suffering. Amid the paeans of victory, sorrows over defeat, the times of hope, the periods of despair, congratulations to the victorious living, dirges for the dead, in the gloomy intervals, all too short, when they were not sustained by the excitement of battle, there drifted in, stories of generous acts, soft words, and brotherly sentiments from him whom they had regarded as their most implacable enemy. They came to know that his heart was a stranger to hatred, that

he was willing to efface himself if his country might be exalted, and that his love for the Union surpassed all other considerations.

They were profoundly impressed, when at his second inaugural, a time when it was apparent that the Confederacy was doomed, he said:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.”

With this favorable condition for responsive sentiment, the scene changed. Appomattox came, and then in quick sequence a total surrender. A civilization which developed some qualities of splendor and worth never surpassed, a civilization allied with an institution which all other Christian countries had freed themselves of, and subsequently condemned, but which the South, with its conditions and environments, could not at once, without precipitating an immeasurable catastrophe abolish, fell into financial, social and political ruin as complete as that which overwhelmed the people of Messina.

The world did not spontaneously comfort them with tender words and overwhelm them with generous aid. Foreign nations dared not offend the triumphant flag. Potential voices at the North rang out fiercely for a bloody assize. Then it was that the great patriot, undazzled by success, untouched by the spirit of revenge, moved by generous sympathies, with the eye of a seer, looked beyond the passions of the times, saw

the surest way for consolidating this people into a Union of hearts as well as of states and stretching out his commanding arm over the turbulent waters, said: "Peace, be still." The magnanimous terms granted to their surrendered soldiers convinced the southern people that Mr. Lincoln, having accomplished by force of arms the great work of saving the union of the states, would consecrate himself with equal devotion to the no less arduous and important work, for the endurance of our national life, of rehabilitating the seceding states, restoring to effective citizenship those who had sought to establish an independent government, and bringing them back to the allegiance which they had disavowed. There was a new estimate by the southern people of his character and motives. They learned that he was not inspired by personal ambition, that he was full of the spirit of abnegation, even to the point of self-abasement, that he did not exult over them in victory, but sorrowed with those in affliction, that his heart was always responsive to distress, his soul full of magnanimity, and that he was filled with a patriotism which held in its loving embrace our entire country. With this new aspect in which he was regarded by our people, I well remember where I stood, and the consternation that filled all faces, when his assassination was announced. I will not say that some fierce natures, that some of the thoughtless, did not exult. But, as a witness of the times, I testify that there was general manifestation of sorrow and indignation. I would not convey the impression that it was an exponent of such feeling for Mr. Lincoln as went out from the people of the North. That would have been as unnatural at

that time, as it would have been ignoble to rejoice over his suffering, or approve the dastardly act that laid him low. It came partly from such chivalric spirit as that which evoked the lament of Percy over the fallen Douglas at Chevy Chase. It came also from a realization of their own condition, the sense of an impending storm, charged with destructive thunderbolts forged by political hatred, and launched by those who would humiliate them, grind their very faces to the earth, make their slaves task-masters over them, and if possible expatriate them and divide their substance, and the belief that Abraham Lincoln, he who had been the leader in the fierce contest between the states, alone so held the affections and confidence of the Northern people that he could speedily "bind up the nation's wounds" and "achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves."

Nearly forty-four years have passed since that woe-ful event. I stood on Decoration Day by the monument erected in Oakwoods Cemetery, mainly by the contributions of northern people, to the memory of the unknown Confederate soldiers who yielded up their lives as prisoners of war at Camp Douglas, and saw the Illinois soldiery fire over those who fought for the stars and bars, the same salute that was fired over those who fought for the stars and stripes. Within a short time there will be unveiled on the capitol grounds at Nashville, a monument to Sam Davis, the hero boy of Tennessee, who was hung as a rebel spy. General G. M. Dodge, who ordered his execution, and many other people of the North were foremost among the contributors. The voice of Wheeler that had urged on the sons of the South

in a hundred battles against the Union, rang out with equal devotion while leading our soldiers from North and South under the flag of our Common Country. In the same uniform, a son of a Grant, and a son of a Lee, ride side by side. Am I not right, here in the North, and in this assembly, in saying that the American people, reunited, with no contest, except in generous rivalry to advance their country's welfare, cherishing, but without bitterness, the proud memories of their conflict, have long since realized the prophecy of Mr. Lincoln at his first inaugural that:

"The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

The death of Mr. Lincoln postponed for a dreary time that happy era.

How much humiliation, sorrow, wretchedness and hate, what an Iliad of woes, to white and black, came through his untimely end, no tongue or pen can ever portray.

As far as the human mind can estimate and compare what was with what might have been, it was for the entire nation, but especially for the South, the most lamentable tragedy in history. My judgment, based upon years of observation and study, is that it was, in the light of subsequent events, more regretted by the southern people than was the fall of the Confederacy.

What conflicts, what ingratitude, what disappointments in his great purposes, he may have been spared, we do not know. But we know that at the height of

his fame, at the triumphant close of the great conflict which he had led, he was, by a tragedy that shocked the world, caught up from the stage of human action and its vicissitudes, and fixed forever as one of the greatest luminaries in that galaxy of illustrious men who will shine throughout the ages.

He passed out of view like tropic sun that,

“With disc like battle target red
Rushes to his burning bed,
Dyes the wide wave with ruddy light,
Then sinks at once and all is night.”

Southern-born, with mind, heart, and soul, loyal to its traditions, believing that the South was within its constitutional rights as the constitution then stood, that her leaders were patriotic, that her people showed a devotion to principles without a touch of sordidness, that such action as theirs could only come from a deep conviction that counted not the cost of sacrifice, cherishing as a glorious legacy the renown of her armies and leaders, whose purity of life and heroism were unsurpassed by those of any people at any one time, yet I say in all sincerity and without reservation, that I rejoice as much as any of you that our country produced Abraham Lincoln, who will as long as great intellect, patriotism, sincerity, self-denial, magnanimity, leadership, heroism, and those graces of the mind and heart which reflect the gentle spirit are cherished, shed luster, not only upon his countrymen, but upon all humanity.

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